

Supernatural element in a midsummer night's dream



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Q. What is the role of the Supernatural in A Midsummer Night's Dream? Ans:

The supernatural has a great importance in the play A Midsummer Night's Dream by Shakespeare. Shakespeare's fairies are largely derived from Warwickshire folk-lore and superstition, though Shakespeare might have also got some hints for them from a number of literary sources. They constitute the chief charm and attraction of the play, and critics after critics have vexed eloquent in praise of them. The fairies are the unusual characters in the play, forming one of the subplots.

The role of the fairies: We might think that a grown writer like Shakespeare must have been slightly mad to write a play with fairies in it for adult audience. But then in his time nearly everyone believed in the existence of Supernatural creatures like fairies, witches, goblins. The three witches of Macbeth have been interpreted as symbols, but Shakespeare's audience must have accepted them as real figure who predicted the future and intensify Macbeth's latent ambition. Like the witches in Macbeth, the fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream are linked with the world of men.

For example, when Oberon accuses Titania of having an affair with the mortal theseus, we realise that morals and fairies do not remain strict separate from each other. In some respects, the fairies are very much like the Athenians. They have a similar social hierarchy. A king and Queen rule them, wholesome fairies simply fetch and carry of the others and could be seen as the counterparts of the Athenian Mechanicals. Oberon, his character and role: The Fairy king Oberon is an imperious and peremptory king. His very first words are both sharp and authoritative : " We'll met by moonlight, proud Titania".

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Titania retorts with, "jealous Oberon", and jealous he is in the sense that he wants Titania's Indian boy, though precisely why is not made clear. It is enough that it is his will, which he is not prepared to have thwarted. He symbolizes an elemental force; not vicious, or aloof from human sympathy, for it is he who takes pity on Helena even while he is pursuing his vengeance on Titania, but arbitrary- to that extent like a haughty God - unaccustomed to having his wishes debated, and strong in the knowledge that what he wants he has the power to get.

And that power is mysteriously supernatural, He can see, as even Puck cannot, Cupid flying 'between the cold moon and the earth' and be a lover to Aurora, goddess of the dawn. He also knows the force of herbs, like a witch, but without a witch's evil malignancy, and he can cast a spell on a new born child, but one that protects the child from harm. He creates complications, but also resolves them so that the lovers are happily united.

As compared with Theseus, another king in the play he exercises much greater influence on the action of the play. Titania, her character and role: Titania, too, is proud, and not easily mastered by her lord and king. To his 'Tarry, rash Wanton; am not I thy lord?' she replies, 'Then I must be thy lady'. And she, too, expresses her character most of all in the poetry she speaks, but, that character is more sensuous and physical than his.

It is evoked, for example, in the speech which describes the consequences of their quarrel on nature and the course of seasons, and especially in her account of her friendship with the mother of the Indian boy, "which balances the sense of devastation in the previous speech with an overwhelming sense

of richness and fertility". Her love of Bottom, turned into an ass, serves to stress the irrationality and absurdity of romantic love. The role of Fairy Attendants: The little Fairies , Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed, who attend on Bottom under order's from their mistress, are the products of Shakespeare's fancy alone.

Their names suggest beauties of nature personified, and their presence gives an excuse for introducing many of the quaint ideas of the countryside. Puck's role and characterization: Puck is the odd creature. He has abilities that rest do not have. His special gifts are that he can fly around earth at great speed and he can execute mischief. And it is for these that he is summoned by Oberon to help him steal the Indian boy from Titania and in the process make a mockery of her for withdrawing her attention and favour from him. Puck's name is of special interest.

For one thing, it sets him apart from Oberon and Titania who have classical names. He is sometimes called by other names, particularly Robin Goodfellow. Robin Goodfellow is an English folk character who is genuinely good fellow. He helps hard worked housewives complete their tasks, he helps butter set and so on But he is also, without warning and for no reason that human being can understand, maliciously mischievous. For example, when an old woman prepares to settle down on a stool, he pushes the stool away so that she falls down and hurts her rear end.

He can also make milk turn sour and prevent the butter from setting, He is not instructed by the devil or some evil spirit but these nasty things for his own amusement. Shakespeare used both good and the bad aspects of the

Robin Goodfellow folk tales in his dramatization of Puck. We can see this in the havoc creates among the young Athenian aristocrats with the love potion. When Oberon tells Puck he put the love juice in the eyes of Demetrius so that he may fall in love with the unhappy Helena, Puck makes a genuine mistake and pours the juice into Lysander's eyes .

Having done so and seen the resultant confusion, Puck simply laughs. The unhappiness of the Athenian women does not move him to correct his mistake. Yet when Oberon scolds him, he does make the correction, ensuring at the same time that corrective juice is poured into Lysander's eyes but not into Demetrius's so that the right couples are married in the end. And he explains to Oberon that he did not plan the mischief but mistook Lysander for Demetrius because they were dressed alike. The entire sequence shows the difference between malice and good side of his character.

The important and revealing aspect of the fairies' attitude towards the Athenians is that Puck cannot distinguish one Athenian from the other. They all appeared to him much alike. One of the " truths" Shakespeare seems to be hinting at is that lovers think their individuality is important while the reader can see that there is infact very little to distinguish them, to show the difference between them. T know the Puck's views of the other character, we need to understand Puck's own place in the hierarchy of the forest.

Puck's relationship with Oberon provides the tension between the fun-filled , mischievous side of the fairy world and its darker, more threatening aspects. In the lighter vein, of course, Puck is Oberon's court jester who changes shape and mimics sounds to make Oberon laugh. But Puck's ability to

change shape, and to make others (notably Nick Bottom) change shape has a potential for unpleasant darker mischief. He confesses that his illusions in the forest, and to drive Lysander and Demetrius “ astray”. Oberon and does his best to hold Puck in check.

For instance, he seriously rebukes Puck when he finds that the later has mistakenly applied the love juice to the wrong persons. The Humans Touch: It is also be noted that Shakespeare has humanized the fairies. Thus the fairy Queen and King quarreled over the Indian boy, and they can also be jealous like mortals. There was a time when Oberon loved Hippolyta, and Titania was in love with the Theseus. They are also capable of pity and sympathy. Thus Oberon pities poor Hermia and decides to make her happy by setting matters right.

Conclusion: Shakespeare’s original and fascinating subject, influenced all subsequent fairy literature and dispelled the old ideas of the fairies as malicious, evil, lawless creatures who had to be obeyed and pleased.

Shakespeare revolutionized the traditional fairy lore, so much so that, “ The picture conjured up in our minds today by the word ‘ fairy’ is as different as could be from the repulsive fairy of the Elizabethans; and the change can be traced to Shakespeare and A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. (C. Clark)